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2. *Folk Explanations of Exchange*

Having noted how the Orokaiva diagnose cases of social conflict, let us now explore the social philosophy underlying these diagnoses. My argument will be in three steps. First, I shall restate in a more generalised form the Orokaiva ideas hinted at in the previous section; secondly, I shall express these ideas in the form of a more abstract model; thirdly, I shall show how the Orokaiva justify their ideas in terms of their own religio-philosophic system.

Orokaiva social philosophy differs from our own, in the first place by its refusal to recognise the authority of anyone outside the individual's extended family, a characteristic to which I shall give more attention later. If the Orokaiva, by and large, order their lives by the same moral principles, they would explain this by their common belief in certain demigods whom they all regard as their ancestors and as sources of authority, and who created certain institutions embodying moral norms to which they all subscribe. Not only do they obey the precepts of these demi-gods, they also re-enact their feats in ritual and identify with them during ceremonies, and in many of their regular expressive activities.

I shall therefore attempt to reconstruct what these demi-gods are said to have taught the Orokaiva about social relations. This reconstruction requires a brief analysis of some myths in which these teachings are contained. The myths all refer to events in original time. I was told that men, in their primordial or pre-cultural state, were living by the top of Mount Lamington (*Sumbiripa Kanekari*), which is traditionally regarded by the Orokaiva as the centre of the universe (Schwimmer 1969). I collected a number of myths explaining the origin of death, strife, fire, houses, marriage, clothing and several other elements of culture. The demigods who transformed human life by introducing these gifts came 'from the mountain'; Sumbiripa himself was the first man to die. He retired inside the mountain and all those who died later are said to stay with him inside the mountain. Hence the rumblings and tremors emitted by the volcano. Two published sources (Tomlin 1951, Benson 1955) show that these beliefs antedate the eruption of 1951.

While men lived by the top of the volcano, there was, according to the myths, no disunity, no quarrelling and no warfare, and men all ate with one another. As they multiplied greatly, so one of the tales records, some of them settled in an unoccupied place at the foot of a *barivo* tree. There they collected saplings, thatch and lashings to build themselves a village. One man stole lashings prepared by another and used them to build his own house. When the owner of the lashings found the thief, the two started to fight. The men present, one and all, became separated into two contending sides which never stopped fighting. *Emboavo aramiko tiketo ijunu avunu ena*: 'Therefore, from that time onwards, they dwelt separately down-valley and up-mountain.' Having started thus, they continued to be alone (*oenga oenga*) and to fight (*isoro ue mitiatera*). Separately cornered they captured, killed and ate each other and thus they then remained. In a final sentence, the narrator of the myth adds that permanent peace has now come and fighting (*isoro*) is finished.

I could not obtain data that would confirm that this stolen cord represents an umbilical cord and that this myth is about the birth trauma. However, the myth

into two separate realms: the human world, comprising villages and gardens, and the wild world, *ariri*, the bush, where everything is dangerous and inimical to man, and where the ghosts (*sovai*) have their abode. The area friendly to man is thus reduced to a small space, whereas the area hostile to man is an infinite expanse. Thus man is forever at strife with all but a small circumscribed portion of the universe. The myth of pig-man restates in another idiom the message of the primal theft of the piece of string.

3. *Domestication of Pigs: Husbandry*

Separate though the worlds of bush and human habitation may be, Orokaiva still view them as linked by an exchange relationship. One side of this transaction has already been described in detail by Williams (1930:267ff.). A man becomes a *sovai* at death. As such he enters into various animals. An important class of *sovai* (though not all *sovai*) can be recognised by the abnormal appearance or behaviour of the animals into which they have entered. They are greatly feared and are thought responsible for a great variety of misfortunes. Thus if a man fears the supernatural dangers of the bush, he does not regard these as generated by anything inherent in nature, but as introduced by dead hunters and killers who retain their human wilfulness while deprived of human bonds.

In certain special circumstances bush creatures may re-enter the protected confines of human society. The most important example of such a reverse transaction between bush and village is furnished by the domestication of pigs. There is, of course, no zoological difference between wild and domestic pigs, both being scientifically known as *sus papuensis* and known in the vernacular as *o ohu*. The myths explaining the domestication of pigs are all very simple. In one of them the first pig ever killed by man was a sow marauding the taro gardens. After killing her, men heard a mournful song by the root of a tree. It was sung by her piglets who were thirsting for their mother's milk. The piglets were taken to the village and became the first domestic pigs. The piglets' song, of course, is still known.

The breed has continued until today, being constantly replenished by foundlings from the bush. As boars are castrated, sows mate in the bush. In the bush around Sivepe some wild boars must still exist, though these are probably the offspring of tame sows who have escaped to the bush.

The domestication of piglets is a complicated task which I once saw performed at Inonda. When a piglet was found in the bush it was given for rearing to an old woman who was an expert at domestication. She made a medicine by chewing together betelnut, *hingi* (a peppery leaf) and *arifa* root (in Sivepe *akore* root would have been used). She spat this medicine into all body apertures: mouth, eyes, ears, nose, rectum, genitals. A few hours later she carried the piglet to a creek, washed it and placed it in a string bag (*eti*) in the same way as a baby. Five days afterwards, the piglet could be seen walking through the village on a leash, held by its 'mother'. After two or three weeks, it was regarded as domesticated.

The medicine was intended to seal the piglet from *sovai* who might otherwise enter it. As a bush animal, the piglet was considered impure, dangerous, and liable to spirit entry. The Orokaiva believe that it is *sovai* contamination which

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We shall need to consider exchange from two points of view: first, as in the preceding chapters, we may consider it phenomenologically, from the viewpoint of the transactional polarity of the exchange partners; secondly, we may consider it from the viewpoint of symbolic thought, as something like the dialogue between *Yin* and *Yang*, as the product of Orokaiva intelligence reflecting upon affective experience.[1] It is this second approach which will be appropriate for much of our discussion about the remarkable Orokaiva myth of the coconut and the betelnut.

2. *The Minor Foods: Objects of Mediation and Paired Symbols*

Although this chapter will deal mainly with the coconut and betelnut, it will be useful first to set this couple into a wider ecological and cultural context. Coconut and betelnut have been chosen for detailed treatment out of a large number of minor foods of the Orokaiva, many of which have their special importance as objects of mediation. An interesting aspect of these minor foods is that Orokaiva symbolic thought arranges them in couples to which a male/female opposition is usually ascribed. Very often these plant couples are grown in close association with one another and it is claimed that they will not prosper unless they are planted together and that, in their wild state, they are also found together. The symbolic association of these pairs of plants may be based on any of a number of shared characteristics: the similar outward appearance of the fruit, a coincidence in the time of fruiting, a similarity in culinary use, in taste, in supposed physiological effects of the fruit when eaten. Sometimes the pair of plants are linked in ritual use and in a common myth.

Among examples of this pairing tendency that may be quoted are two varieties of breadfruit, called *oga* and *eumba*; two condiments important in initiation ritual: the *puga* nut and the salt vine *hoe*; the yam and a red fruit called *hamesi*. The coconut (*vu*) and betelnut or *areca* (*sa*) are similarly a pair of subsidiary foods between which there are important points of resemblance which led to their being paired together, and important points of difference which led one of them to be classified as male and the other as female.

Coconut and betelnut are planted together in villages and also in gardens. Both nuts are eaten raw, young coconuts for refreshment, *areca* for relaxation, and both are consumed between meals. Both nuts grow on palms. Both foods have notable (though different) biochemical effects on those who eat them. Both foods are standard gifts made to strangers who visit a village, a coconut being offered as refreshment immediately upon arrival while betelnut is chewed (along with *hingi* pepper and lime) during the conversation. The two nuts are also associated in ritual use. At mortuary feasts, the most important gift objects are large quantities of betelnuts and coconuts harvested from the palms of the deceased, while dry coconut and betelnut are strewn on graves by affines of the deceased. Finally, coconut and betelnut are associated in an important myth which I intend to discuss in detail.

In studying plant couples such as coconut and betelnut two aspects of exchange need to be considered: first, exchanges between persons in which the food products appear as objects of mediation and secondly, mythical exchanges between the male and female plant, where the two plants appear as exchange

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824 partners, while objects of mediation are not imaginary and magical, but have a real
772 existence. I shall deal with these two aspects in turn.

3. *Coconut as an Object of Mediation*

824 Coconut has several culinary uses: it is eaten raw; soup is made of the flesh; the
[252] squeezed flesh produces coconut cream in which taro and delicacies such as river
[262] crabs may be cooked. Young coconuts are cut open at the top and used for a
[262] refreshing drink. Coconut is reserved for two kinds of everyday food gift:
[272] cooked dishes offered to guests and young coconut offered to visitors on arrival.
[431] Waddell's figures for coconut transactions are surprisingly low (less than 1 lb. per week disposed of in an average household). In Inonda, where the climate favours the coconut, there has been sporadic commercial exploitation of the nut.

[574] Coconuts are also a feasting food. At ordinary harvest feasts and bridewealth payments they are seen on display platforms along with taro and other
[262] vegetables. Williams (1930: 44) reports that they used to be placed under a taboo when a large feast was pending. I have already mentioned that at mortuary
[764] feasts they are the principal object of mediation between the plant emblem group of the deceased and the village which has provided services to the deceased at the time of death (See Williams 1930: 223–6). I saw a variant of this ceremony at Hohorita in 1967. The plant emblem groups of the deceased couple provided massive gifts displayed on a platform: feast taro, tins of fish, cartons of flour, corned beef in tins, sugar-cane, pots of cooked vegetable food, small bags of salt, smoked meat, a dead pig suspended from a stick, rice, bread, an abundance of betelnut and carved taro suspended from horizontal poles placed above the platform, while at least 1000 lbs. of coconuts, strung to poles supporting each other diagonally, were seen everywhere among the other gifts.

[262] Coconut is correctly believed to be a valuable adjunct to children's diet, as it
[146] provides first-class protein. The belief is explained by Orokaiva in a myth quoted by Williams (1928: 122) according to which the first child ever to eat a coconut
[231] grew miraculously overnight. Children do eat a good deal of it and it is also fed regularly to dogs and chickens. Orokaiva also regard the effects of coconuts on
[235] dogs as miraculous. As neither dogs nor children have any other substantial supply of first-class protein, the coconut relieves a very real diet deficiency. Whatever religious significance is given to the coconut is related to this.

824 Coconut oil is used as a cosmetic for hair and body, not only to enhance
778 beauty but also for its magical efficacy. In a ritual performed over a man-slayer, a coconut was broken over his head as a purificatory and 'defensive' device in
[302] the sense that the fluid would drive away dangerous spirits (1930: 175). With
[789] the same end in view, the bodies of female initiands and certain ornaments worn at dances are rubbed with coconut oil (1930: 207). It would appear, in view of
[881] this evidence, that the coconut is in general identified with *ivo* communicated by the dead to the living. The coconuts of a dead leader are thought to contain his *ivo* in a form which is communicable, not to his kinsmen to whom these
[761] coconuts are taboo, but particularly to his affines. The quoted ritual uses of the coconut are all associated with some contact with the world of death, i.e. critical situations in which the living have been in contact with death and need the help
[764] of the dead to obtain *ivo*. While this *ivo* is communicated, through the mediation

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limit the relevance and power of anthropological study. A cataclysm of such awesome proportions must obviously have had psychological as well as social effects on Orokaiva individuals since the same cataclysm was, after all, experienced in one form or another by everybody. If a culturally homogeneous group has any intellectual facility in the development of common symbols and the transformation of its symbol system, then it is reasonable to suppose that the eruption would have social effects of this less tangible kind.

The Mount Lamington eruption, viewed in this way, offers a case history of theoretical importance. Where the immediate cause of relocation is a natural disaster, we are dealing with contingency in its purest form: an event no sociological (or psychological) theory could possibly predict. Can such an event change the structure of a people's symbolic thought? If it can, then this would cast doubt on any claim that cultural systems are determinate, as they could be changed at any time by unpredictable contingencies. The question whether the content of the symbol systems and social systems of specific cultures is determinate has been raised throughout the work of Lévi-Strauss. Determinacy may be found, however, in the processes of human thought as we seek to comprehend an event, however unpredictable. If our method of understanding humans is the analysis of symbolic thought, then the study of unpredictable contingencies is important in revealing the genesis of symbolic thought.

EXPLANATIONS OF THE DISASTER

I showed in an earlier work that Mount Lamington has long had a central position in the Orokaiva world order (Schwimmer 1969: 5–6). In fact, the Orokaiva regard Mount Lamington as the center of the cosmos. It is the place where, in Orokaiva myth, death, warfare, and fire originated. Many of the transforming deities who are said to have established the rituals and social customs of the Orokaiva came from the crater of this mountain. The division of the populations of the Northern District into tribes or language groups supposedly occurred at the same place. The mountain is called Sumbiripa Kanekari, 'the separation of Sumbiripa', after the myth in which the mountain opened up and split into several unscalable crags. Sumbiripa was hunting on the mountain with